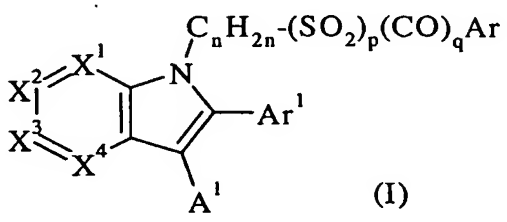
Claims

1. A compound of formula (I), or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof:



(I)

wherein:

Ar is a moiety containing at least one aromatic ring and possesses 5-, 6-, 9- or 10-ring atoms 0 to 3 of which may be N, O or S heteroatoms of which at most 1 will be O or S; which moiety may be optionally substituted by groups Q^1, Q^2 or Q^3 wherein Q^1 is a hydroxy group, fluorine, chlorine, bromine or iodine atom or a C_{1-6}alkyl, C_{1-6}alkyl substituted by not more than 5 fluorine atoms, C_{1-6}alkoxyl, C_{1-6}alkoxyl substituted by not more than 5 fluorine atoms, C_{2-6}alkenyl, C_{2-6}alkynyl, $(CH_2)_{0-3}N(C_{1-4}alkyl)_2$, nitro, cyano, nitrile, carboxyl, esterified carboxy wherein the esterifying moiety has up to 4 carbon atoms optionally substituted by not more than 5 fluorine atoms; or $-SO_2(C_{1-6}alkyl)$,

Q_2 is a fluorine, chlorine, bromine or iodine atom or a methyl, trifluoromethyl, methoxy, trifluoromethoxy or difluoromethoxy group,

Q_3 is a fluorine, chlorine, bromine or iodine atom or a methyl, methoxy, trifluoromethoxy or difluoromethoxy group;

Ar^1 is a moiety containing at least one aromatic ring and possesses 5-, 6-, 9- or 10-ring atoms 0 to 3 of which may be N, O or S heteroatoms of which at most 1 will be O or S; which moiety may be optionally substituted by groups Q^4, Q^5 or Q^6 wherein Q^4 is a hydroxy group, fluorine, chlorine, bromine or iodine atom or a C_{1-6}alkyl, C_{1-6}alkyl substituted by not more than 5 fluorine atoms, C_{1-6}alkoxyl, C_{1-6}alkoxyl substituted by not more than 5 fluorine atoms, C_{2-6}alkenyl or alkynyl, nitro, cyano, nitrile, carboxyl, esterified carboxy wherein the esterifying moiety has up to 4 carbon atoms optionally substituted by not more than 5 fluorine atoms,

Q^5 is a fluorine, chlorine, bromine or iodine atom or a methyl, trifluoromethyl, methoxy, trifluoromethoxy or difluoromethoxy group,

Q^6 is a fluorine, chlorine, bromine or iodine atom or a methyl, methoxy, trifluoromethoxy or difluoromethoxy group;

X^1 is N or CR^a; X^2 is N or CR^1; X^3 is N or CR^2; X^4 is N or CR^b; with the proviso that at least one of X^2 and X^3 is not N; wherein R^a and R^b are independently selected from hydrogen, fluorine or chlorine or C_{1-4}alkyl, C_{2-4}alkenyl, C_{1-4}alkoxy, C_{1-4}alkyl or alkoxy optionally substituted by up to 6 fluorine atoms and/or a hydroxyl group;

n is 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 or 6;

p+q is 0 or 1;

A^1 is C_{1-6}alkyl, C_{2-6}alkenyl, or C_{1-6}alkyl or C_{2-6}alkenyl substituted by C_{1-4}alkoxy or up to 5 fluorine atoms or a non-aromatic ring of 3 to 8 ring atoms which may contain a double bond and which may contain a O, S, SO, SO_2 or NH moiety and which may be optionally substituted by one or two alkyl groups of up to 2 carbon atoms or by 1 to 8 fluorine atoms;

one of R^1 and R^2 is a Het or is hydrogen, fluorine, chlorine or bromine atom or a C_{1-4}alkyl, C_{2-4}alkenyl, C_{1-4}alkoxy, C_{1-4}alkyl or alkoxy substituted by up to 5 fluorine atoms, nitrile, carboxy, C_{1-4}alkoxycarbonyl, C_{1-4}alkyl or C_{2-4}alkenyl substituted by a carboxy or C_{1-4}alkoxycarbonyl group, or a NR^3R^4, $SO_2NR^3R^4$ or $CONR^3R^4$ group where R^3 is hydrogen, C_{1-4}alkyl, SO_2R^5 or COR^5 and R^4 is hydrogen, hydroxyl or C_{1-4}alkyl or R^3 and R^4 are alkylene linked to form a 5- or 6-membered ring, and R^5 is C_{1-4}alkyl optionally substituted by up to 5 fluorine atoms;

Het is a 5 or 6-membered aromatic ring of which 1, 2, 3 or 4 ring atoms may be selected from N, O, S with at most 1 being O or S which ring may be substituted by 1 or 2 groups selected C_{1-4}alkyl or hydroxy or tautomers thereof, or is 2-hydroxy-cyclobutene-3,4-dione;

the other of R^1 and R^2 is a hydrogen, fluorine or chlorine atom or C_{1-4}alkyl, C_{2-4}alkenyl, C_{1-4}alkoxy, C_{1-4}alkyl or alkoxy substituted by up to 6 fluorine atoms and optionally a hydroxyl.

2. A compound as claimed in Claim 1 wherein R^a is hydrogen.

3. A compound as claimed in Claim 1 or Claim 2 wherein R^b is hydrogen.

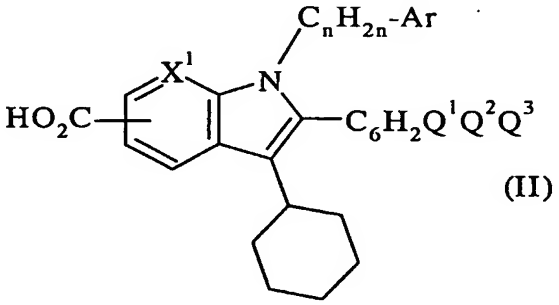
4. A compound as claimed in any one of Claims 1 to 3 wherein Ar is optionally substituted phenyl, pyridyl, imidazolyl, thiazolyl or oxadiazolyl, where the optional substituent is selected from fluorine, chlorine, bromine, C_{1-6}alkyl, hydroxyl, C_{1-6}alkoxy, CF_3, cyano, carboxyl, methylsulfonyl and $(CH_2)_{0-3}N(C_{1-4}alkyl)_2$.

5. A compound as claimed in any one of Claims 1 to 4 wherein n is 0, 1 or 2.

6. A compound as claimed in any one of Claims 1 to 5 wherein Ar^1 is phenyl, naphthyl, indolyl, tetrahydronaphthyl, pyridyl, imidazolyl, furyl, thienyl, pyrolidyl, oxazolyl, thiazolyl, pyrazolyl, pyridazolyl, triazolyl, oxadiazolyl, thiodiazolyl or quinonyl, optionally substituted by Q^4, Q^5 or Q^6 as defined in Claim 1.

7. A compound as claimed in any one of Claims 1 to 6 wherein Ar is cyclohexyl.

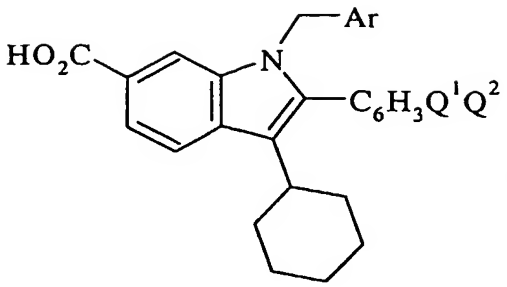
8. A compound as claimed in Claim 1 of formula (II):



(II)

wherein n, X^1, Ar, Q^1, Q^2 and Q^3 are as defined in Claim 1 or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof.

9. A compound according to claim 8 of formula (III):



(III)

wherein Ar, Q^1 and Q^2 are defined in Claim 1 or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof.

10. A compound as claimed in Claim 1 selected from:

1-benzyl-3-cyclohexyl-2-phenyl-1*H*-indole-5-carboxylic acid,

1-benzyl-3-cyclohexyl-2-pyridin-2-yl-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid,

1-benzyl-3-cyclohexyl-2-(4-methoxyphenyl)-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid,

3-cyclohexyl-1,2-diphenyl-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid,

1-benzyl-3-cyclohexyl-2-phenyl-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid,

3-cyclohexyl-1-(4-methylbenzyl)-2-phenyl-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid,

3-cyclohexyl-1-[(2-methyl-1,3-thiazol-4-yl)methyl]-2-phenyl-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid,

3-cyclohexyl-1-(3-methylbenzyl)-2-phenyl-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid,

3-cyclohexyl-2-phenyl-1-(pyridin-2-ylmethyl)-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid trifluoroacetate,

3-cyclohexyl-1-[4-(methylsulfonyl)benzyl]-2-phenyl-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid,

3-cyclohexyl-1-(3,5-dibromobenzyl)-2-phenyl-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid,

3-cyclohexyl-1-(1H-imidazol-4-ylmethyl)-2-phenyl-1H-indole-6-carboxylic acid trifluoroacetate,

3-cyclohexyl-2-phenyl-1-(pyridin-3-ylmethyl)-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid hydrochloride,

3-cyclohexyl-2-(2-fluorophenyl)-1-(2-phenylethyl)-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid,

1-(3-cyanobenzyl)-3-cyclohexyl-2-phenyl-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid,

3-cyclohexyl-2-phenyl-1-(pyridin-2-ylmethyl)-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid hydrochloride,

1-(3-carboxybenzyl)-3-cyclohexyl-2-phenyl-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid,

3-cyclohexyl-2-(4-hydroxyphenyl)-1-[(4-methylphenyl)sulfonyl]-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid,
1-benzoyl-3-cyclohexyl-2-phenyl-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid,
3-cyclohexyl-2-phenyl-1-(phenylsulfonyl)-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid,
1-benzyl-3-cyclohexyl-2-(3-{[isopropyl(methyl)amino]-methyl}phenyl)-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid,
3-cyclohexyl-1-({5-[(dimethylamino)methyl]-1,2,4-oxadiazol-3-yl}methyl)-2-phenyl-1-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid,
or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof.

11. A compound as claimed in any one of Claims 1 to 10, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof, for use in therapy.

12. The use of a compound as claimed in any one of Claims 1 to 10, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof, for the manufacture of a medicament for treatment or prevention of infection by hepatitis C virus in a human or animal.

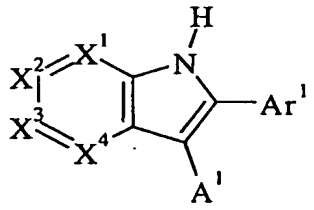
13. A pharmaceutical composition comprising a compound as claimed in any one of Claims 1 to 10, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof, in association with a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier.

14. The pharmaceutical composition as claimed in Claim 13 which further comprises one or more other agents for the treatment of viral infections such as an antiviral agent, or an immunomodulatory agent such as α-, β- or γ-interferon.

15. A method of inhibiting hepatitis C virus polymerase and/or of treating or preventing an illness due to hepatitis C virus, the method involving administering to a human or animal (preferably mammalian) subject suffering from the condition a therapeutically or prophylactically effective amount of the pharmaceutical composition claimed in Claim 13 or Claim 14 or of a compound as claimed in any one of Claims 1 to 10, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof.

16. A method of preparation of a pharmaceutical composition, involving admixing at least one compound as claimed in any one of Claims 1 to 10, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof, with one or more pharmaceutically acceptable adjuvants, diluents or carriers and/or with one or more other therapeutically or prophylactically active agents.

17. A process to prepare a compound as claimed in any one of Claims 1 to 10 which comprises the reaction of compounds of the formulae (IV) and (V):



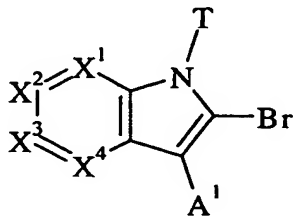
(IV)

$L\text{-}C_nH_{2n}\text{-}(SO_2)_p(CO)_qAr$

(V)

wherein X^1, X^2, X^3, X^4, A^1, Ar^1, Ar, n, p and q are as defined in Claim 1 and L is a good leaving group such as chlorine, bromine, iodine, methanesulfonate, tolyenesulfonate, triflate or the like.

18. A process to prepare a compound as claimed in any one of Claims 1 to 10 which comprises reacting the compound of the formula (VI):



(VI)

wherein T is a $C_nH_{2n}(SO_2)_p(CO)_qAr$ group with $Ar^1B(OH)_2$ in the presence of a Pd[0] catalyst wherein X^1, X^2, X^3, X^4, A^1, Ar^1, Ar, n, p and q are as defined in Claim 1.